

by L. Peter Boice

The Department of Defense and Endangered Species



*A botanist points to a rare example of rabbitbush (*Chrysothamnus eremobius*) in the Sand Spring Area of the U.S. Air Force's Nellis Range in Nevada. Endemic to small populations on the Nellis Range and the Fish and Wildlife Service's adjacent Desert Wildlife Range, this plant and other rare species are protected under the Air Force's overall integrated natural resources management strategy.*

Photo by Dr. Teri Knight/The Nature Conservancy of Nevada

The Department of Defense (DoD) has embraced its stewardship responsibilities for the rich variety of natural resources on the lands it manages, managing them for multiple use, sustained yield, and biodiversity integrity. But management decisions affecting DoD lands are directed by the fact that these lands were set aside to serve military training and testing purposes. The challenge for the DoD is to balance the need to use its air, land, and water resources for military training with the need to conserve these resources for future generations.*

A number of significant actions are affecting how the DoD manages its biological resources, which include rare animals and plants. Many of these changes will improve its management of endangered species:

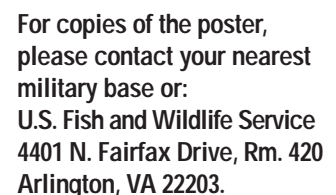
Passage of the Sikes Act amendments.

The Sikes Act authorizes the DoD to manage natural resources on military lands, and the 1997 amendments to the Act provide many opportunities for the DoD to enhance its management. All military installations with significant natural resources are required to develop and implement integrated natural resources management plans (INRMPs) in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the appropriate State wildlife agency. The

amendments also provide for public comment on these plans. The DoD's military mission is also explicitly recognized: each INRMP shall ensure "no net loss in the capability of military installation lands to support the military mission of the installation." These amendments also substantially raised the visibility of natural resources management within DoD by requiring annual reports to Congress and by giving a higher funding priority to implement natural resources projects listed in INRMPs. Because of these improvements, the INRMPs are better action plans for protecting endangered and threatened wildlife and plants than critical habitat designation while accommodating a base's military mission.

Completion of most planning level biological inventories.

*Boice, L. Peter. "Defending Our Nation and Its Biodiversity." *Endangered Species Bulletin*. January/February 1997. Volume XXII, No. 1.



REPRINTED FROM THE ENDANGERED SPECIES BULLETIN NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2000 VOLUME XXV NO. 6 5

DoD's Legacy Resource Management Program

In November 1990, Congress passed legislation establishing the DoD Legacy Resource Management Program to provide special funds to preserve those parts of our nation's natural and cultural heritage under military control. The program assists the military in protecting and enhancing resources while supporting military readiness. Many of the products and partnerships described in this edition of the *Bulletin* are funded through the Legacy program. More information about the Legacy program and the process for submitting project proposals are available via the web at <http://www.dodlegacy.org>.

The DoD has emphasized the importance of baseline resource inventories for the past 6 years. We needed to know what resources we have and where they are so we can manage them properly. More than 75 percent of military installations have completed planning level surveys, and another 20 percent have partial surveys.

Establishment of regional ecosystem management initiatives.

Cooperative regional partnerships enhance communications, increase program efficiencies, and promote improved understanding among the partners. The DoD adopted the ecosystem approach as its preferred process for natural resources management in 1994. It has established a variety of important regional initiatives for such regions as the Sonoran Desert, Great Basin, Gulf Coastal Plain, Colorado Front range, Fort Huachuca (Arizona) watershed, and Camp Pendleton (California). In addition, the DoD's first official ecosystem management effort, the Mojave Desert Ecosystem Initiative, has evolved from a top-driven program one with substantial regional support from both the military and Department of the Interior agencies.

Access to better biological information.

The DoD is working with the Association for Biodiversity Information (ABI) and The Nature Conservancy to gain access to data on the location of threatened and endangered species, as well as species of concern, via a new database. The system, which is now available throughout DoD, compiled natural heritage program data at the quad-level on USGS topographic maps for selected western states. Additional states are being added to the system in 2001. In a related new initiative, the ABI and the Service will help the DoD identify "species at risk" on and adjacent to its military lands in the United States.

Use of conservation easements on non-DoD lands.

The habitats on DoD installations are often the last, best hope for imperiled species. Many surrounding lands are experiencing rapid development and other encroachments. It is important that the DoD work to cooperate on resource management for these species beyond installation fencelines. For example, the Army is aiding landowners in the establishment of conservation easements near Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to protect additional habitat for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*).

Development of new tools for DoD land managers.

Two new handbooks will soon be available to the DoD's natural resources managers. The *INRMP Handbook* will help DoD managers develop and implement their management plans, while the *Joint Stewardship Handbook* will help them work with managers from the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to manage the DoD's withdrawn and special-use lands. We have also developed new training courses oriented specifically towards the needs of military land managers, and have reviewed and endorsed additional courses developed by other federal resource management agencies.

Other changes are likely to have mixed or even negative impacts on how the DoD manages its threatened and endangered species:

Decreased spending on long-term conservation efforts.

The DoD's annual expenditures on threatened and endangered species have increased by one-half in the past 5 years to approximately \$27.6 million. The Sikes Act amendments also added substantial new funding requirements. Furthermore, the number and complexity of conservation challenges have increased notably during the past decade. Yet the total amount budgeted for the DoD's conservation programs, as



well as for the Army's Integrated Training Area Management program, has declined slightly in real dollar terms during this same period. This suggests that although the DoD is doing what is needed to remain in short-term compliance, it may be missing significant opportunities to improve efficiencies and reduce the potential for long-term problems.

Loss of natural resources positions.

All federal agencies are undergoing studies to identify downsizing and contracting-out possibilities. Unfortunately, although these actions may produce short-term savings, they also may result in a loss of institutional memory, expertise, and dedication. Long-term initiatives may be abandoned. For example, comprehensive ecosystem management efforts, including volunteer and partnership development, are likely to suffer. There may also be a temptation to make decisions based on poten-

tial short-term gains, rather than on long-term resource sustainability requirements.

Endangered species management on military lands remains a challenging and critical focus for DoD's resource managers. The articles in this special edition provide details on some of their more recent efforts. Success ultimately depends upon their skills and expertise, aided by the proper tools, training, and resources. Continued partnerships with the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service are essential elements of these efforts.

L. Peter Boice is Director, Conservation, Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Environmental Security), Pentagon, Washington.

Observing birds on the Goldwater Air Force Range, Arizona

PHoto by Douglas Ripley/U.S. Air Force